Mains Practice Question

Q. What do you understand by VVPAT? What are the issues associated with it and steps taken by ECI in this regard? (250 words)

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Approach

- Write brief introduction about VVPAT and its utility.
- Give the concerns and issues associated with VVPAT.
- Describe the steps taken by ECI regarding VVPAT concerns.

Answer

Introduction:

- The Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail is a method that provides feedback to voters. It is an independent verification printer machine and is attached to electronic voting machines.
- It allows voters to verify if their vote has gone to the intended candidate. Its use provides assurance that voting through EVM has gone to intended candidate. It allows the voter to verify his/her choice.

Body

Issues with VVPAT

- **Small sample for VVPAT:** Opposition and civil society raised concerns about insignificant sample of VVPAT (voter verifiable paper audit trail) i.e. one randomly selected booth per constituency. They have demanded that at least 50% of VVPAT slips should be counted to verify that EVM are not rigged.
- **Operational issues:** VVPATs are very complicated and slight mishandling can result in failure. India has different climatic zones, and the paper used in VVPATs also decides their functioning e.g. In Meghalaya Assembly by polls where more than 33 per cent VVPATs failed as the paper used was not suitable for the humid weather there. Operation of this machine will prove to be challenging considering the significant scale of election process in India, especially in general elections.
- **Manpower problem:** There are issues of manpower to manage VVPAT machines. Considering the complexity VVPAT is introducing in to electoral process there is need for competent polling officers. To train ordinary public servant for polling duty and safe and sound handling of machines especially VVPAT, EC will require enhanced capacity building efforts.
- **Procurement issues:** Another challenge is to procure required VVPAT machines without delay. The Election Commission (EC) is struggling to meet the deadline it committed to Supreme Court for procuring 16 lakh voter-verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT) machines for the Lok Sabha elections 2019.
- In earlier concluded by-elections (e.g. in Kairana Lok Sabha by-elections) there were reports of last minute glitches with EVM and VVPAT. Such last minute malfunctioning of these machines tend to raise doubt. EC faces challenge of dealing with this issue, as failure of some machine is natural and

can only be reduced to some extent only.

Steps taken by ECI

- **Technical changes:** ECIL—which manufactures the machines—suggested that EC should procure paper which does not soak humidity. EC have now procured humidity-resistant paper for humid areas.
- **VVPAT Sample Size:** The Election Commission had engaged the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) to systematically analyze and scientifically examine the issue of sample size of VVPAT Slip verification with electronic count of the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs).
- **EC's response:** The Election Commission has responded to Opposition parties' demand of 50 % VVPAT slips verification, and told the Supreme Court that 50% VVPAT slip verification in each assembly segment of a parliamentary constituency or assembly constituency on an average would increase the time required for counting to about six days, thereby delaying the election results.

Conclusion

- Fair electoral process is axiomatic for democracy. Therefore well functioning VVPAT are necessary to allay the fear about tempering of EVM.
- EC should proactively act to address the concerns with VVPAT. Constitution of India has empowered EC to conduct free and fair election, EC should use its constitutional powers to meet its constitutional responsibility.

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